



## Mu Ko Chang National Park

Mu Ko Chang National Park is a collection of over 40 large and small islands. The island chain is situated in the Gulf of Thailand approximately 8km from the coast of Trat province. The main island Ko Chang is the second largest island in Thailand after Phuket and measures nearly 30km long and almost 14 km wide. The other main islands in the group are; Ko Chang Noi, Ko Khlum, Ko Wai, Ko Lao Ya, Ko Mai Si and Ko Rang. The park received status as a national park on 31st December 1982 to become the 45th national park in Thailand. The park covers a total area of 650 km<sup>2</sup> of which about 458km<sup>2</sup> or 75.5% is marine.

Mu Ko Chang National Park is located in the southeastern region of Thailand close to the border with Cambodia. The island runs parallel to the coast and appears very mountainous from the shore due to the mountain ridge which runs the length of the island. The ridge is composed of several summits the tallest of which are; Khao Lan, Khao Chom Prasat, Khao Khlong Mayom, Khao Salak Phet and Khao Yai, which is the highest peak reaching 743m above sea level. The rock of the island is mainly Granitic and dates from approximately 230-195m years ago. The geology produces a very mountainous island, but with rounded slopes rather than sheer cliffs.

The mountain slopes are covered by dense Tropical Evergreen Forest which due to the low level of habitation on the island is largely undisturbed (until recently). The principle tree species present include; *Dipterocarpus* spp., *Anisoptera costata*, *Hopea odorata*, *Podocarpus neriifolius*, *Croton* spp., *Caryota* sp., *Calamus* spp., *Bauhinia* sp., *Pandanus* sp., and *Amomum* spp. Around the villages of Salak Phet, Salak Khok, Khlong Son and Khlong Phrao Bay are areas of Beach Forest. The dominant tree species here are; *Terminalia catappa*, *Melaleuca leucadendra*, *Eugenia* spp., and *Pandanus odoratissimus*. In the more sheltered spots, especially where freshwater enters the sea to produce brackish water, fairly large areas of Mangrove Forest exist. These mangrove forests are dominated by species of three main Genus; *Rhizophora*, *Avicennia* and *Bruguiera*.

The island of Ko Chang has many streams and rivers which are fed by the rainfall collected on the mountainous slopes of the island. Due to the great amount of rainfall here these streams are very clean and supply water all year round. The principle streams on the island are Khlong Son, Khlong Mayom, Khlong Khangkhao, Khlong Bang Bao, Khlong Phrao and Khlong Nonsi. This mix of mountains and streams produces some very beautiful

waterfalls the most notable are; Than Mayom, Khlong Phlu, Khlong Nonsi, Khiri Phet and Khlong Nung Waterfalls.

Ko Chang islands are situated a long way away from any mainland rivers and thus the water around the islands is very clear and free from sediment. Thus the beaches are of clean white sand with crystal clear seawater and rich marine life. In the sheltered locations coral reefs occur with numerous coral types such as; Massive coral, Stagshorn coral, Laminar coral, Columna coral, Giant clams, Sea anemone, Sea fan, Sea star, Marine fishes and seaweeds. This marine diversity can be observed at many locations around the park, particularly good sites include; Ko Chang noi, Ko Yuak, Ko Man Nok, Ko Khlum, Ko Wai, Ko Lao Ya, Ko Ngam, Ko Rang, Ko Kra, and along the easternside of Ko Chang island. Another good place to explore the marine life is around the wrecks of the Thai warships "Songkhla" and "Chonburi" in Salak Phet bay on the southern end of the island.

### Fauna

Wildlife surveys undertaken in 1992 recorded 29 species present within the national park. Animals seen included; Wild pig, Barking deer, Stump-tailed macaque, Small Indian civet, Javan mongoose plus several species of Bats, Squirrels, Rats and Mice. The bird list for the park currently numbers 74 species of which 61 are resident. More common sightings include; Pacific reef-egret, Yellow-vented bulbul, Nightjar, Pacific swallow, White-breasted waterhen, Green imperial pigeon and Oriental pied hornbill. Migratory visitors to the islands include; Little heron, Greater sand-plover, White-winged tern, Brown noddy, Black-naped oriole, Pale-legged leaf warbler, Artic warbler and Barn swallow. Two common breeding visitors to the islands are the Blue-winged pitta and the Hooded pitta, both of which have very distinctive whistling calls often heard early in the morning and in the evening. Commonly seen passage migrants include Blue-throated flycatcher, Blue-and-white flycatcher and the Eastern crowned warbler. The survey team discovered 42 species of reptiles and amphibians. More commonly seen of which are; Soft shelled turtle, Monitor lizard, Water monitor, Reticulated python, Burmese python, Racer, Rat snake and King cobra.

An endemic species found here and nowhere else is the aptly named Ko Chang frog (*Rana kohchang*).



## History

Many years ago in Salak Phet bay at the southern end of Ko Chang island a border confrontation occurred between Thai and French forces, which was a small episode in the long running Indochinese war. The battle took place on 17th January 1941, between three Thai warships the Songkhla, Chonburi and Thonburi and seven French cruisers. The French ships had entered Thai waters and were met by the Thai warships. In the ensuing battle the French ships were repulsed, but in the process the Royal Thai Navy ships, Songkhla and Chonburi sank, with the loss of many men. Every year on the anniversary of the battle the Royal Thai Navy return to the spot where the ships sank to commemorate the battle and the sailors who took part in the engagement.



## Travel information

To get to the islands from Bangkok a bus should be taken from the southeastern bus station on Sukhumvit road to Trat province. Once in Trat town a taxi will take you to the ferry terminal at Laem Ngop which is 16km from Trat town. The one ferry goes to several locations on the island so the trip to your chosen destination can take anything from 45 minutes to 5 hours, depending upon where you wish to get off and how busy the boat is. Travel around the islands is relatively easy with Jeep taxis and motorcycle taxis. The tracks are also suitable for walking.

Between the months December to March is the best time to visit the islands, but the islands are open all year round. The dry season occurs between November to May, the wet season between June to October. The wettest month is August with a monthly total of about 700mm of rain.

## Tourist locations

There are many places to interest the visitor to Ko Chang national park, the principle attractions being,

**Sea battle site**, on the southern end of the island in Salak Phet bay. The site of a confrontation between Thai and French warships. The site is marked and has information displays, especially popular on the anniversary of the engagement. The ships can also be visited by scuba diving.

**Than Mayom waterfall**, this three level waterfall is located near to the park headquarters. The waterfalls are 500m walk from the office along a marked trail.

**Khlung Phlu waterfall**, this is a large waterfall of three levels. The waterfall is situated in the forest behind Khlung Phrao beach. To get to the falls a track by the river is followed for about 3kms to the start of the falls.

**Khlung Phrao beach and Laem Chaiyachet**, this is a very long beach and reaches from Kai Bae beach to the Chaiyachet headland. The beach is very good for bathing with a very gentle slope and in a very sheltered location. The headland at Chaiyachet has a very small beach but is best visited for the interesting rock formations, swimming is possible here.

**Kai Bae beach**, this beach is at the southern end of Khlung Phrao bay, and is a safe beach for bathing.

**Ko Lao Ya Island**, this island takes about 2 hours to reach from the ferry terminal at Laem Ngop on the mainland. The island has several resorts situated on beautiful beaches with clear water and some good coral reefs.

**Ko Wai Island**, another popular island situated just to the south of Ko Lao Ya and is reached by the same ferry. The island has accommodation, instead of large beaches the coast is mainly rocky. The main attraction is the beautiful coral reefs which occur just offshore. Some of the best and largest coral structures in the area are located here. The island is also a centre for sports fishing.

**Ko Rang Island**, this island is situated about 18 kms south of the main island. There are no facilities here but it is a good site for camping out. The island is also home to the Edible nest Swiftlet, the nests being collected annually.

According to the National Parks Act of 1961, the following activities are permitted; swimming, diving, sports, picnicking and camping. Tents are permitted provided you set them up yourself. Leave anything valuable at the office if you plan to be away from your site for many hours. Please heed any warnings or advice that park staff may have. Be sure to notify park staff if you make a fire, and do not take any branches from trees, use only wood off the ground and be sure to extinguish your fire with water or sand before leaving the site. **Respect the local culture and religion; nude or topless sunbathing is forbidden.** Do not disturb other guests or wildlife. Stay on established trails, if you want a guide ask one of the rangers in the office.

Mu Ko Chang National Park has several bungalows which should be booked in advance either at, **Mu Ko Chang National Park, Ban Hin Tabouy, Laem Ngop District, Trat 23120** or at the **Reservations office, National Park Division, Royal Forest Department, Chatuchak, Bangkok, 10900. Tel (02) 5790529, 5794842, 5795269.**

Map of Mu Ko Chang National Park

